

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AWARENESS POLICY



County of San Luis Obispo

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AWARENESS POLICY	1
INTRODUCTION	1
POLICY	1
TYPES OF PERPETRATORS	2
STRANGERS	
CLIENTS	
FAMILY MEMBERS OR ACQUAINTANCES	
EMPLOYEES	
ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES	3
COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR	
PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT	
CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAM	
DEPARTMENT HEADS	
MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS	
EMPLOYEES	
PHYSICAL SECURITY	4
TRAINING AND INFORMATION	5
INVESTIGATION	5
DOCUMENTATION	5
WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AWARENESS	6
INTRODUCTION	6
PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE	6
PROTECTION THROUGH PLANNING	
PROTECTION THROUGH BUILDING SECURITY	
PROTECTION FROM STRANGERS	
PROTECTION FROM CLIENTS	
PROTECTION THROUGH SELECTION AND HIRING	
THREATS OF VIOLENCE	9
THREAT REPORTING	9
THREAT INVESTIGATION	9
THREAT ASSESSMENT	10
CONTACT WITH THE PERPETRATOR OF THE THREAT	10
BOMB THREATS	10
LETTER BOMBS	11
THREATS BY EMPLOYEES	12
WHEN AN EMPLOYEE FRIGHTENS OTHERS	12
DISCIPLINE AND DISCHARGE	13
OTHER FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS	14
THREATS BY DOMESTIC PARTNERS OF EMPLOYEES	14
THREATS BY "STALKERS"	15
SUPPORT FOR THREAT VICTIMS	16
INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE	17
IMMEDIATE RESPONSE TO INCIDENTS	
CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS DEBRIEFING	
NOTIFICATION OF RELATIVES AND NEXT OF KIN	
SUPPORT FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY THE INCIDENT	
CONCLUSION	17
RESOURCES	18
PARTIAL BIBLIOGRAPHY	19
TRAINING MATERIALS	19
BOMB THREAT CHECK LIST	20

COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AWARENESS POLICY

-IF THERE IS IMMINENT DANGER-

Call 911 (or 9+911) if the situation poses imminent danger to employees and the public.

Then notify Personnel at 781-5959 to activate necessary members of the Crisis Management Team.

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INTRODUCTION

San Luis Obispo County is committed to serving a wide range of citizens, some of whom can be under severe stress and have nowhere else to turn. Providing services to these and other persons can place County employees in a position of vulnerability to violence or threatening behavior. The County values its employees and clients and, with this Policy, the County affirms its commitment to providing work environments and facilities that are free from violence. Authority for this Policy is Title 8, Section 3203 of the California Administrative Code.

POLICY

As a matter of policy the County of San Luis Obispo will not tolerate violent acts or threats of violence, either verbal, written or implied, toward employees by other County employees, clients or members of the public.

For the purposes of this policy, “violence” includes any willful touching of a person in a harmful or unwanted way, and a “threat” of violence includes any statement, course of conduct or other action that would cause a reasonable person to believe that violence may occur. Some examples:

- Grabbing, pushing or striking another person.
- Pinching, groping or fondling another person, either sexually or otherwise.
- Fighting, challenging another person to fight.
- Stalking or following another person.
- Accosting or harassing another person in an intimidating way, either face to face or by telephone, fax, mail, computer or other form of communication.
- Displaying, threatening to use or using a firearm, or other weapon in the work environment.

TYPES OF PERPETRATORS

STRANGERS

To help protect employees from violent strangers in the community, the County will provide crime prevention educational material and workshops to employees and will address security issues involving work sites and facilities.

CLIENTS

As a matter of policy, the County of San Luis Obispo will not tolerate violent acts or threats of violence towards employees by clients or other members of the public.

Employees in many departments deal with clients who are distressed and who may make threats or commit acts of violence. The County will provide support and guidance to employees so that threats of violence can be recognized and prudently addressed, and so that acts of violence can be prevented if possible.

Client violence may be difficult to control, and employee exposure to such violence may be a result of working with special client/patient populations. The handling of some client violence situations may properly be the primary function of local law enforcement agencies.

FAMILY MEMBERS OR ACQUAINTANCES

If the workplace is affected by a violent act or threat of violence by an employee's family member or acquaintance, the County will provide support and guidance for the victim and his or her co-workers.

EMPLOYEES

The County of San Luis Obispo will not tolerate validated violent acts or threats of violence (either verbal, written or implied) by employees. The County will not discriminate or retaliate against employees who express a concern regarding threats of violence in the workplace. In such cases, the County endorses immediate and definitive use of the disciplinary process up to and including discharge from County employment, consistent with ensuring the safety of co-workers. Criminal prosecution will be pursued as appropriate. The County also advocates a preventive approach whereby Civil Service rules and regulations are fairly and consistently administered, and where troubled employees receive guidance and, if necessary, professional assistance.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

The County Administrator shall ensure that this Policy is fully implemented and adapted to unique needs at the agency/department level, and that the County organization maintains an effective support structure for responding to acts and threats of workplace violence.

The Office of the County Administrator, Risk Management Division will maintain and include this Policy as part of the County's written Occupational Injury and Illness Prevention Program and will administer claims.

PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT

The Personnel Department has overall responsibility for identifying resources that agencies and departments can use in developing their training plans and violence prevention measures. The Personnel Department will also administer workplace violence prevention measures involving Labor Relations (including compulsory medical or "fitness for duty" examinations) and the Employee Assistance Program, and will coordinate post-incident activities involving employee services.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAM

The Crisis Management Team is a resource to be used by County Departments. In most instances, Team members will be called on individually for advice. Only in rare cases will the Team be required to meet as a unit. The Team will consist of the following:

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| ➤ Administration: | County Administrator or his/her designee |
| ➤ Affected Department: | Department Head or his/her designee |
| ➤ Facilities: | General Services Director or his/her designee |
| ➤ Fire: | Fire Department of Jurisdiction |
| ➤ Health: | Health Agency Director or his/her designee |
| ➤ Law Enforcement: | Sheriff or his/her designee |
| ➤ Legal: | County Counsel or his/her designee |
| ➤ Personnel: | Personnel Director or his/her designee |
| ➤ Psychological: | Mental Health Director or his/her designee |
| ➤ Risk Management: | Risk Manager or his/her designee |
| ➤ Victim Witness: | District Attorney or his/her designee |

The Risk Manager (or his/her designee) or Personnel Director will convene selected members of the County Crisis Management Team as necessary to assess the seriousness of any situation reported by a department.

Team Members are responsible to report changes in telephone numbers to Risk Management. Risk Management will verify the accuracy of Team information (names and telephone numbers) every six months and will update the Team Member List as necessary.

DEPARTMENT HEADS

Department Heads are responsible for ensuring that this Policy is implemented in their respective organizations and that the unique needs of their organizations are addressed through procedures and training. Each agency and/or department must develop a plan for preventing and responding to acts of workplace violence. These plans need not be lengthy, but they shall contain as a minimum an Emergency Plan attachment that includes facility-specific procedures (such as alarm buttons and escape routes), notification lists, and a time line for training designated employees.

MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS

It is the responsibility of managers and supervisors to make safety their highest concern. When made aware of a real or perceived threat of violence, management shall conduct a thorough investigation, provide support for employees, and take specific actions to help prevent acts of violence. Managers and supervisors shall also provide information and training for employees as needed. Management shall document investigation facts and the training provided.

EMPLOYEES

Employees should learn to recognize and respond to behaviors by potential perpetrators that may indicate a risk of violence. Employees shall also place safety as the highest concern, and shall report all acts of violence and threats of violence.

PHYSICAL SECURITY

Since the County is a public organization that wishes to remain accessible to its clients to the fullest extent possible, it is not the County's intent to implement a widespread "fortification" of its facilities. The County prefers to train its employees to be the primary means of reducing workplace violence. However, certain facilities, due to the nature of the service provided, may need barriers, cameras, metal detectors, better locks, and the like. Where such structures are necessary, they should be constructed in the least obtrusive way feasible.

TRAINING AND INFORMATION

Although acts of workplace violence cannot be precisely predicted, a knowledge of how to respond to perpetrators can help County employees minimize the risk of violence or injury. The County will provide designated employees with training that will help them take appropriate precautions and respond wisely when confronted with a potentially violent individual. Departments will structure this training to meet the unique needs of each operation.

Since the vast majority of violent acts perpetrated by employees and employee family members are preceded by a number of behaviors that signal an escalating situation, the County will provide employees with written materials that will help them recognize the warning signs of violence, and will recommend professional consultation or initiate intervention measures before a violent act occurs.

INVESTIGATION

The County will investigate all threats, regardless of the nature of the threat to verify the source of information. The purpose of the investigation is to establish a probable cause and a good faith belief the potential for violence is real. The investigation may intrude into the perpetrator's private matters and to prevent defamation claims it should be prompt, thorough and confidential before warning other employees.

If the investigation reveals the threat is genuine and perhaps imminent, the County will take immediate action. Safety or security measures may have to be provided for the intended victim. Depending on the circumstances, security measures might be necessary before meeting with the person making the threat. The investigation will be non-threatening and non-confrontational. The facts and County action taken will be documented to demonstrate that the County took prompt and reasonable steps based on the evidence available.

DOCUMENTATION

Incidence of violence and the appropriate disciplinary measures are to be thoroughly documented and retained in the employee's personnel file. In case of a current employee being hired, transferred or otherwise employed by another County department, it shall be the responsibility of the hiring department to review the employee's personnel file to acquaint themselves with any documentation of past violent incidents.

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AWARENESS

INTRODUCTION

Workplace violence is a concern to many San Luis Obispo County employees. This booklet provides information that will be useful to you as a supervisor when questions or issues arise regarding workplace violence involving a stranger, a client, an employee or an employee family member or acquaintance. The Workplace Violence Awareness Policy is available from your department Safety Representative.

PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE

PROTECTION THROUGH PLANNING

Work with your Department Head, Safety Representative, Safety Committee and General Services Liaison to prepare a Workplace Violence Awareness section to your Department Emergency Plan. This section does not have to be lengthy, but it should reflect the unique needs of your individual operations. As a minimum, the section should include the following elements:

Specific roles and responsibilities, such as who goes to the front desk, who calls police, who directs incoming emergency response vehicles, who handles media relations, etc.

- Evacuation routes and safe assembly areas.
- Means of communication, such as portable radios, cordless telephones, cellular telephones, silent alarms, buzzers, and intercom systems.
- Liaison with other agencies and organizations. This may include some of the resources listed at the end of this booklet.
- Notification of relatives and next of kin. (Make sure your plan includes how phone numbers can be obtained.)
- Counseling resources for victims, witnesses, and others affected by the incident.
- Media relations. You may want to involve your department or agency public relations manager (if you have one) or coordinate in advance with the County's Administrative Office at 781-5011.
- Training, both initial and ongoing, for designated supervisors and employees. Include a time line and the types of training (videos, guest speakers, etc.) that will be used. Training may involve a short video and a limited discussion, or for employees who are at greater risk, it may involve a longer video combined with written handout material or even an all-day seminar. Try to assess the specific training needs of your employees and find appropriate training materials to address these needs. See the back of this booklet for a list of training resources.
- Protective measures for employees who perform tasks such as cash handling that may involve a greater risk of stranger violence.
- Reception desk procedures.

Additional elements of the Emergency Plan should encourage employee use of counseling resources such as the Employee Assistance Program, and the use of supervisory techniques to enhance communication and promote peaceable social interactions. Once it is written, your Workplace Violence Awareness section should be read, understood and discussed by all employees.

PROTECTION THROUGH BUILDING SECURITY

Since the County's policy is to keep its facilities as accessible as possible to its clients, the County prefers to not rely on physical security measures as the primary means of preventing workplace violence. However, there are certain measures that will not affect the open appearance of the facility nor greatly impact your department's budget.

- Install a central reception area for each facility. This will enable you to better identify strangers and screen clients. This can help control client access to employee work areas.
- Provide an escape route for reception personnel. Do not set up your reception area in such a way that the receptionist is blocked in by the client, but have a clear escape route to the back of the desk or to the side so that the receptionist can make a hasty retreat if necessary.
- Check exterior lighting, especially in areas where employees walk to their cars. Consult with the Crime Prevention Unit (781-4547) for preventing crime through environmental design. Discuss lighting needs with your General Services Liaison, who can discuss improvements with the General Services Facility Manager.
- If necessary, ask General Services (781-5200) to prune landscaping to eliminate hiding places near entrances, walkways, and parking areas.
- Install a buzzer or silent alarm that alerts employees in the back that a problem exists at the front desk. An alternative is to have a code name to be announced over your intercom, such as "Paging Dr. Green."
- Make sure that all non-public entrances are kept closed and locked, and that signs are posted where necessary directing clients to public entrances. Check with the fire department in your local jurisdiction before locking a door that is not equipped with a "panic bar" on the inside.
- Post emergency numbers for police, fire, and medical services. If your phones require dialing "9" first, be sure the notices say "9+911". Telephone stickers are available from Risk Management (781-5011).
- The Sheriff's Office Crime Prevention Unit (781-4547) conducts risk analysis surveys of County buildings; call them if a survey has not been performed for your facility.

It may be necessary at some facilities to go beyond the minor physical measures listed above. Installation of such equipment as metal detectors, special locks, and bullet resistant glass may be advisable but are beyond the scope of this booklet. If your department feels that such measures are needed, discuss the idea with the Sheriff's Office Crime Prevention Unit (781-4547). General Services Capital Programs (781-5200) can give you an idea of the costs involved. Submit all such ideas to your Administrative Analyst. Be aware that

such measures, although effective, are not a fail-safe protection against workplace violence. Any physical security improvements should also be accompanied by a particularly aggressive implementation of the other suggestions contained in this booklet.

PROTECTION FROM STRANGERS

The Sheriff's Office Crime Prevention Unit offers educational programs in crime reduction and personal safety. The presentations include robbery prevention/reduction, personal safety and assault prevention. Crime prevention materials are provided with these programs. To help your employees protect themselves against violent crimes, schedule a presentation and distribute the materials regarding crime prevention.

Work with your employees to address any work practices (such as cash handling) that may involve a risk of violence. Where appropriate, post signs stating that limited cash is kept on hand.

PROTECTION FROM CLIENTS

Much of what you as a supervisor can do to prevent client violence has to do with training your employees. Consult one of the resources at the back of this booklet for sources of training and/or training materials.

Some procedures that can help prevent client violence include having clients sign in at the reception area, wear a visitor badge, and/or be escorted if they must enter work areas. Talk with your employees, your supervisor, and one or more of the resources listed at the back of this booklet to get their thoughts about measures that could improve the security of your particular operation.

Many employees ask about security guards. In certain controlled situations, properly trained and screened security guards can be effective, but it is not possible to cover every situation, and security guards are quite expensive. The best protection is to have trained staff that know how to respond appropriately in the event of a threat or a violent act.

PROTECTION THROUGH SELECTION AND HIRING

The best way to reduce violence by employees is to not hire potentially violent employees in the first place. Although applicant's potential for violence may be the farthest thing from your mind during the selection process, the hiring interview is a prime opportunity to probe an applicant's approach to potentially volatile situations. You might base your questions on a scenario, preferably one that is related to the specific job opening and describes a situation where a hypothetical employee is treated in a way that would tend to provoke anger.

Pay close attention to the applicant's responses – they may be subtle, but they may give you valuable information that will help you in your hiring decision.

A second, very important step is to check references and verify employment dates and titles with prior employers before making a job offer. There are a number of legal issues involved with these checks, and many laws restrict what a prospective employer may ask. California law, however, gives law enforcement agencies the right to obtain a peace officer applicant's employment information from previous employers. (California Government Code Sec. 1031.1). If you need advice in this area, contact Personnel.

THREATS OF VIOLENCE

A threat of violence can take many forms. Verbal comments, phone calls, and letters are common, but a threat can include symbols such as mutilated animals – anything that would make a reasonable person fear for his or her safety.

THREAT REPORTING

If one of your employees reports a threat of violence, take the threat seriously and tell the employee that reporting the threat was the right thing to do. Assure him or her that the report will be handled discreetly and will only be shared with those who need to know.

Your next steps after receiving a threat report:

- Inform your immediate supervisor and your Department Head
- Notify the Crisis Management Team (Personnel 781-5959 or Risk Management 781-5011.)
- If you think that a violent act is imminent, call the police at 911 (or 9+911)
- Warn employees immediately.

THREAT INVESTIGATION

Investigate all threats, regardless of the nature of the threat. Ask the following questions, and keep proper notes and records.

- Who made the threat?
- Whom against was the threat made?
- What is the alleged perpetrator's relationship with the victim?
- What was the specific language of the threat?
- Was there any physical contact that would lead you to believe the threatening person will follow through?
- Determine the names, addresses and telephone numbers of witnesses to any threats.
- What was the time and place where the threat occurred?
- Have there been any prior incidents of violence or threats?
- Is there any documentation such as letters or recorded phone messages, or other physical evidence?
- Is there any other information or any suggestions that would help in the investigation?

If you feel you should meet with witnesses, do so immediately. Maintain confidentiality except where the release of selected facts is needed to ensure the security of others.

THREAT ASSESSMENT

Will the perpetrator actually follow through on a threat of violence? This is a difficult question to answer, and you should not try to answer it on your own. Local police should be called if someone is breaking the law or creating an immediate danger to anyone. County Mental Health Services (781-4700) provide 24-hour coverage to evaluate threats that appear to stem from mental illness and to determine whether psychiatric hospitalization is indicated.

CONTACT WITH THE PERPETRATOR OF THE THREAT

If you need to make contact with the alleged perpetrator, make sure you are not placing yourself in danger by doing so. When making contact, ask non-threatening open-ended questions. Be supportive in the initial stages of the conversation, but do not suggest that you would be willing to give in to demands made or violate any laws, County policies, contracts, or Civil Service rules.

BOMB THREATS

Bomb threats are a unique kind of threat because the stakes are so high. The two most common reasons for bomb threats calls are:

- The caller knows about a bomb and wants to minimize injury or property damage. The caller may be the bomber or someone else who has information about the bomb.
- The caller wants to create an atmosphere of anxiety in order to disrupt normal operations at a County facility.

Most bomb threats are made by phone. Any employee who receives calls directly could receive a bomb threat. Copy the Bomb Threat Checklist at the back of this guide for your employees to keep under their telephones.

If you receive information by telephone or other communications that a bomb has been placed in a County facility, follow these procedures:

- Document your conversation on the BOMB THREAT CHECKLIST form.
- Call 911 (or 9+911)
- Notify the County Administrative Office or Risk Management.
- Do not search your work area unless directed.
- If you notice a suspicious item:
 - Do not touch the item
 - Notify your supervisor

- Evacuate your work area if directed by the County Administrator/Department Head
- Proceed to your designated assembly area.
- Wait for further instructions from authorities.

The decision to evacuate after a bomb threat will be based on the amount of detail available and whether the call appears to be a legitimate threat or a prank.

If an evacuation is needed:

- Pay attention to specific evacuation directions and follow them.
- Leave doors and windows open to let the blast wave escape.
- Take your brief case, purse, lunch bag, etc. with you to minimize the search.
- The General Services Facility Manager will work with law enforcement to keep anyone from re-entering the building.

The search, if required, needs to be done by people who normally occupy and are familiar with the facility. Law enforcement will help, but they do not have the resources to do it alone.

If your employees help with the search, make sure that they:

- Check their immediate work area and report any suspicious objects to you, their supervisor, or the General Services Facility Manager.
- Do not touch any suspicious object – leave removal and disposal for the Bomb Squad.

LETTER BOMBS

Letter bombs vary in size and shape, and are usually addressed and booby-trapped to reach a specific target.

Be alert for unusual markings:

- Foreign mail or special delivery.
- Excessive postage.
- Handwritten or poorly typed address.
- Addressed to a title only, or the wrong title with a name.
- Unknown or no return address.
- Misspellings of common words.
- Restrictive markings, such as “Personal”, “To Be Opened Only By....”.

Watch for strange packaging:

- Excessive or lopsided weight.
- Rigid, uneven, or sloppy envelope.
- Protruding wires or foil.
- Oil or grease stains; strange odor.
- Excessive tape or string.
- Ticking.

If you suspect a package may be a bomb, DO NOT try to open it. Call 9-911 and notify your supervisor.

THREATS BY EMPLOYEES

You may encounter a situation where the alleged perpetrator is a County employee. If you become aware of such a situation, conduct an investigation as described above. Keep an open mind. Remember that a report of a threat may have been fabricated in order to retaliate against the alleged perpetrator. To make sure the information you have is first hand, try to talk with several people who directly observed the threatening behavior.

Use common sense in taking any personnel actions, and call Personnel at 781-5959 if you need guidance. They may recommend placing the alleged perpetrator on administrative leave while you investigate further. Ask Personnel how to best obtain additional information, and specifically about a compulsory medical examination to determine fitness for duty. If Personnel recommends that you interview the perpetrator, discuss with them beforehand what, if any, security measures should be taken during the interview.

WHEN AN EMPLOYEE FRIGHTENS OTHERS

There can be times when a troubled employee becomes a troubling employee. This usually begins when a pattern of behavior escalates to the point where co-workers are afraid of an employee, or it can be a crisis that ultimately leads to a violent act. However, people rarely commit a violent act “out of the blue,” and people don’t “just snap.”

A violent act is almost always preceded by a number of warning signs or changes in behavior. Since these changes can be subtle, it is important to observe behavior carefully. Some of these warning signs are listed below.

Use caution when reading this list – it is not intended as an evaluation tool for you to assess the stability of an employee, since a display of one or more of these signs does not necessarily mean that a person will become violent. This list is simply a summary of the kinds of behaviors displayed by individuals who have at times committed violent acts. The purpose of this list is to heighten your awareness and to help you to determine if you have a cause for concern.

Consider these behaviors as a whole, and don't focus on one isolated act.

- Blaming others; inability to accept responsibility. Holding a grudge, especially against a supervisor, or a co-worker who is alleged to have received some “favor” such as a promotion at the perpetrator's expense.
- Paranoia – indicated by statements that everyone is against them, or by panicking easily.
- An increased propensity to push the limits of normal conduct, with disregard to the safety of self or co-workers.
- Veiled or open threats of violence, e.g., predicting “bad things are going to happen,” especially threats that are detailed or appear to be well-planned.
- A history of discipline or litigation; reacting poorly to discipline or performance evaluations.

- Irritability, belligerence, hostility.
- Excessive focus on weapons, police or the military or flashing weapons for reaction.
- Changes in behavior, such as a deterioration of work performance or an increase in concentration problems; becoming inappropriately withdrawn, increasingly angry, or agitated – or out of touch with reality. This may also signal a substance abuse problem.
- A resumption or escalation of drug and alcohol abuse.
- Reacting with great stress to workplace events such as layoffs, discharges, demotions, reorganizations, labor disputes, or to personal/family problems such as divorce, bankruptcy, etc.
- Depression.
- Crossing a co-worker's or supervisor's physical boundaries ("getting in their face") physical posturing or aggressiveness, stalking, excessive phone calls, etc.
- A known personal history of violent, reckless, or anti-social behavior.
- References to or identification with mass murders and infamous incidents of workplace violence. Having a fascination with recent incidents of workplace violence, and expressing approval of the use of violence under similar circumstances.
- An obsessive involvement with the job, which becomes the sole source of identity.
- A "loner," with little or no involvement with co-workers.
- A combination of the use of stimulants, paranoid behavior, and the purchase of weapons can be a particularly risky combination.

If you observe a change in an employee's behavior that fits the overall pattern of this list, it is a cause for concern. It is important that you communicate any concern immediately. Tell your supervisor, and call Personnel at 781-5959. Do not attempt to determine whether or not an employee is going to become violent based on behavior you observed; leave this kind of assessment to the experts. At the same time, do not become complacent nor put off calling the numbers above if you have a concern.

DISCIPLINE AND DISCHARGE

If one of your employees becomes a troubling employee it is important to start appropriate personnel actions immediately. Remember that the County's Workplace Violence Awareness Policy prohibits any violent or threatening behavior and provides for disciplinary action as needed. This may include suspension or discharge. The progressive discipline process includes a wide range of options. Call Personnel at 781-5959 if you need advice or assistance in any of these areas. Do not let such problems persist unaddressed. The worst thing you can do is to ignore a problem or have an employee transferred to another department, because the problem will just crop up there.

Document all behaviors that contribute to your concern. This includes comments made to you or other employees, threats – either written or verbal, or behaviors that seem either inappropriate or scary.

The investigation may establish that you have reasonable cause to put the employee on administrative leave pending the initiation of discharge procedures. If you decide to place the employee on administrative leave, plan carefully (in consultation with Personnel) before you meet with the employee to inform him or her of your decision. The following steps may help to reduce the likelihood that the employee will resort to violent behavior.

- Always treat the employee with respect.
- Inform the employee prior to the meeting of his or her right to union representation during the meeting.
- Do not dwell on the reasons for your decision.
- Do not negotiate. Your decision is final.

When the discharge process results in the employee's separation from the County, two more steps may be helpful:

- Ask the employee where he or she would like you to forward his or her mail. This will help the employee understand that the discharge is in fact final, but at the same time gives him or her a sense of control.
- Ask the employee what he or she would like you to tell future employers who call regarding references. This again gives the employee some sense of control and helps address one of the primary fears of an employee who is fired – what you say to a prospective employer will affect his or her prospects of getting another job.

OTHER FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

The investigation may reveal that accusations against the alleged perpetrator were false. In this case, you may have to dig deeper to determine and deal with the root causes of such false accusations.

You may want to consult with County Mental Health Services (781-4700) regarding other actions to be taken if mental illness appears to be involved. If the investigation determines that the employee is not a threat, but still has personal problems that need addressing, work with Personnel to determine the best course of action.

If the threat assessment determines that the employee is a threat, warn all potential victims as soon as possible.

THREATS BY DOMESTIC PARTNERS OF EMPLOYEES

Whether the violence occurs at home or at the workplace, employees and their coworkers are affected. Increasingly, batterers are seeking out their domestic partners at the workplace because of their accessibility there.

Signs that an employee is being battered include:

- Frequent injuries or injuries inconsistent with the stated cause.
- Frequent use of sick leave; absenteeism and tardiness.
- Frequent “outside” telephone calls, usually in hushed tones
- Decreased productivity, poor concentration, fatigue, depression, crying.
- Appearance and grooming deteriorate.
- Coworkers may “cover” for employee (field incoming calls, etc.).

Many victims of domestic violence are ashamed and embarrassed. Although you must respect their right to privacy, it is also your responsibility to monitor employee work performance and workplace safety.

If you suspect an employee is battered at home and work performance is affected:

- Discuss work performance problems with employee and review expectations.
- Provide information about the Employee Assistance Program (EA.).
- Contact the County’s Victim /Witness Assistance Center for general information about domestic violence (extension 5821).

If an employee tells you they are a victim of violence at home:

- Review security measures, emergency procedures, safety of employee.
- Contact the County’s Victim/Witness Assistance Center for domestic violence information, resources (extension 5821).
- Review, if appropriate, employee’s leave options (sick leave, leave without pay, catastrophic leave).

THREATS BY “STALKERS”

Stalking is when a perpetrator “willfully, maliciously, and repeatedly follows or harasses another person and makes a credible threat with the intent to place that person in reasonable fear for his or her safety”. (California Penal Code, sec. 646.9). Stalking goes beyond mere harassment in that threats of violence are involved. A stalker can be anyone from an anonymous admirer to an ex-spouse.

If one of your employees becomes the victim of a stalker, take the situation seriously. Provide referrals for expert help, and do whatever you can reasonably do to protect the victim from unwanted calls or contacts at work. Lives have been saved by a supervisor's decisive action. Such actions might include:

- Calling the police at 911 (or 9+911) if the victim is in immediate danger.
- Calling and/or referring the victim to threat assessment consultation from Victim/Witness Assistance Center at (781-5821) or to Mental Health Services (781-4700) for assessment of behavior arising from mental illness .
- Moving the victim's desk to another area.
- Obtaining a Temporary Restraining Order against the perpetrator. California law now permits an employer to seek a temporary restraining order against a perpetrator (including a perpetrator who is also an employee) who is stalking an employee, elected official, volunteer, or independent contractor. (Ch. 29, Code of Civil Procedure sec. 527.8). But experience has shown that these

orders often do not prevent further stalking; instead, they can trigger a violation of the terms of the order – or a violent act. Restraining orders should therefore be used with extreme caution, and only after thorough consultation with threat assessment experts and knowledgeable legal counsel.

SUPPORT FOR THREAT VICTIMS

In the flurry of activity following a threat of violence, remember to consider the needs of the victim(s). Since threat victims can become anxious or fearful, take the time to listen to their concerns, offer your support and, within the confines of confidentiality, keep them informed. If necessary, arrange for group counseling through the Crisis Intervention Hotline at 549-8989 or 1-800-549-8989.

INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE

IMMEDIATE RESPONSE TO INCIDENTS

Your response to an incident of violence will depend on the situation, and whether or not there are injuries or deaths involved. The Workplace Violence Awareness section of your Emergency Plan can help guide your actions. If you have not prepared such a section, you may want to take the following actions:

- Call 911 (or 9+911)
- Notify your supervisor
- Assign persons to handle:
 - Evacuation (if needed)
 - Directing incoming Emergency Response Vehicles
 - Communication with outside agencies
 - Media relations
- If needed, use Evacuation Routes and go to your Assembly Point(s).
- Decide on means of communication, such as portable radios, cordless telephones, cellular telephones, silent alarms, buzzers, and intercom systems.

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS DEBRIEFING

All those affected by the incident can benefit from a Critical Incident Debriefing. Contact one of the counseling resources listed at the back of this pamphlet for sources of trained counselors. Such services can reduce negative long-term effects of the event. Be sure to arrange for follow-up sessions, as well as additional debriefing sessions if needed.

NOTIFICATION OF RELATIVES AND NEXT OF KIN

If an employee is severely injured or killed in an act workplace violence, the likelihood of future claims and lawsuits can be reduced if the notification process is carried out professionally and sensitively. Notification of next of kin should be handled at the top levels of the County's organization, thus be sure you or your

supervisor contacts your agency/department head and Risk Management prior to making any such notification.

SUPPORT FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY THE INCIDENT

All those affected by the incident, including co-workers, supervisors, witnesses, clients and survivors and next of kin will benefit from offers of support – including counseling, transportation, and other logistical assistance that would help ease the pain. In summary, any gesture of kindness during this time will do a great deal to provide comfort and support – and help to prevent future claims and lawsuits by family members. Since expenses for such support can be an issue, especially when out of town family members are flying in, decisions regarding payment should be made by the executive managers involved.

It will help the emotional well-being of co-workers if clean-up procedures required by an incident begin immediately so that the work site is restored to a normal appearance as soon as possible. This may include replacing broken windows, painting, carpet replacement, etc. Ensure this work is done quickly and professionally – ideally within one working day.

Organizations such as the Hospice listed on the back of this guide can provide some additional guidance in this area. You may also want to provide some kind of activity where the deceased or injured can be remembered. This may be a memorial service, a wake, or some other type of activity. One organization provided flowers and blank books in deceased employees' offices so co-workers could record their thoughts and feelings regarding their departed co-workers. It is little touches like these that go a long way toward facilitating the healing process.

CONCLUSION

Hopefully, you and your employees will never be involved in an incident of workplace violence. But due to the types of services the County provides, and the violent nature of modern society, it is important to understand how to help prevent, prepare for, and respond to such incidents. This booklet has provided a starting point for such an understanding, but you should now discuss specific training and preparedness needs with your employees, and work with your supervisor to fully address those needs.

RESOURCES

CONTACTS:

Crisis Intervention:

- Hotline of SLO County - 549-8989 (24 hours) ~ or ~ 1-800-549-8989
- Incident response - Emergency Dispatch 911 (or 9+911)
- Incident reporting and recovery - Crisis Management Team (Personnel) 781-5959 and Risk Management 781-5011.

Referrals:

Advice regarding labor laws and liabilities - County Counsel 781-4221

Building Modifications - General Services Building Maintenance or Capital Improvements 781-5200

Claims management (in the event of an incident involving injuries or property damage) Risk Management 781-5011

Conflict Resolution Center - 549-0442

Counseling - Employee Assistance Program 1-800 999-7222

Counseling - (incident recovery, debriefing, brief treatment for post-traumatic stress)

➤ Mental Health Services - 781-4700

➤ Hospice of San Luis Obispo County, Inc. - 544-2266 or 434-1164

Guidance regarding different cultures; information about the County's Sexual Harassment Policy - Personnel 781-5959

Hiring guidance - Personnel 781-5959

Landscape pruning - General Services 781-5200

Media relations - County Administration 781-5011

Next of kin notification (in the event of serious injury or death) - Contact department head and Risk Management - 781-5011

Personnel action guidance, including compulsory medical/fitness for duty examinations - Personnel 781-5959

Psychiatric assessment - Mental Health Services 781-4700

Training videos - Risk Management 781-5011

Training, Risk Analysis Surveys, Materials - Sheriff's Department 781-4547

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TRAINING MATERIALS

“Call to Action: Managing Violence in the Workplace:” A video available for free loan from the County Supervisors Association of California Excess Insurance Authority (916) 631-7363.

“Violence in the Workplace” video available from Risk Management 781-5011

The Sheriff's Office Crime Prevention Unit offers a variety of brochures and free crime prevention workshops. 781-4547

BOMB THREAT CHECK LIST

Most threats are made by telephone. If you receive a bomb threat call, please remember:

- ❖ Remain calm
- ❖ Document the call: Date: _____ Time of Call: _____
Time Call Ended: _____
- ❖ Questions to ask:
 - Where is the bomb right now? _____
 - When is the bomb going to explode? _____
 - What kind of a bomb is it? _____
 - Why did you place the bomb? _____
 - Where are you calling from? _____

Exact Words of Call: _____

Next steps:

- ❖ Notify a supervisor
- ❖ Call 9-911
- ❖ Call the administrative office at 781-5011

Describe Caller's Voice:

- ☐ Male ☐ Female
- ☐ Young ☐ Middle Aged ☐ Old
- ☐ Accent/Type: _____
- ☐ Tone of Voice: _____
- ☐ Is Voice Familiar? _____ Whom does it sound like? _____
- ☐ Background Noise? _____ Describe Noise: _____
- ☐ Other Voice Characteristics: _____

Name of Person Receiving Call: _____

Department: _____ Phone No. _____

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►► SUSPICIOUS PACKAGES, LETTERS OR OTHER OBJECTS ◀◀

DO NOT TOUCH a suspicious-looking item
Warn others to stay away from item
Notify a supervisor immediately
Call 9-911 for further help